



Northumberland County Council

CABINET

Date: 11 January 2022

Outcomes of Consultation on the proposals for Atkinson House Special School

Report of the Executive Director of Adult and Children's Services, Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson, Children's Services

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Purpose of Report

This report sets out the outcomes of informal consultation on a proposal to relocate Atkinson House Special School to a former school site in Ponteland and to change the designation of the school to become co-educational.

This consultation has arisen as a result of the need to provide additional places for young people, including girls, in Northumberland with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH) in September 2022 as a result of the steady upward trend in the demand for special school places in the county and nationally over the last ten years.

Cabinet is now asked to permit the publication of a statutory proposal in line with the requirements of *The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013* following the outcomes of informal consultation.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Decide on the basis of the educational rationale for the proposal, feedback received from consultation and any recommendations received from the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, whether to permit the publication of a statutory proposal to setting out the intention of the County Council to implement the following proposals:
 - Relocate Atkinson House Special School to the former site of Richard Coates CE Primary School with effect from 1 September 2022;

- Change the designation of Atkinson House Special School from a single sex provision to a co-educational provision with effect from 1 September 2022.
2. Approve feasibility and design works to be undertaken at risk at an estimated cost of circa £250k.
 3. Note that should the recommendation above be approved, the outcomes of the formal consultation following publication of the Statutory Proposal on 13 January 2022 would be brought back to Cabinet on 8 March 2022 for a final decision to be taken in relation to the proposals set out in recommendation 1.
 4. Note the implications for Home to School Transport set out in para. 26 of this report

Link to Corporate Plan

These proposals are most closely linked to the Council's priority for Learning (achieving and realising potential, but it is also strongly linked with the priority for Connecting (having access to the things you need).

Key Issues

1. On 12 October 2021, Cabinet approved the initiation of informal consultation on proposals to relocate Atkinson House Special School to the site of a former school in Ponteland and to change its designation to co-educational with effect from September 2022.
2. Six weeks of consultation began on 13 October and closed on 1 December 2021, all during school term-time. Feedback from the consultation is summarised in paras. 16-27.
3. Cabinet approved consultation on this proposal as a result of the rationale for the need for additional SEMH places for young people within Northumberland. The majority of feedback has been received from parents of local schools in Ponteland and local residents, while there have also been a significant number of responses from the parents and carers of students of Atkinson House Special School. The reasons for the views of these various stakeholder groups are set out at para. 16-27.
4. The Council has a strategic aim of working towards providing sufficient special school places within Northumberland to meet the needs of children and young people so that they are able to be educated as close as possible to their home communities.
5. Bearing in mind the issues and concerns raised by specific groups of consultees during the consultation, the conclusion of this informal consultation

is that Cabinet is recommended to approve the publication of a statutory proposal on 13 January 2022 running to 10 February 2022 to relocate Atkinson House Special School to a former school site in Ponteland and the changes its designation to become co-educational based on the overwhelming case for support of children and young people with SEMH special educational needs. The implications of these recommendations are set out in para. 32 of this report.

Background Information

6. Cabinet approved the initiation of informal consultation on a proposal to relocate Atkinson House Special School and to change its designation to become co-educational on 12 October 2021.
7. The rationale for the proposal is centred on the premise that the number of children and young people who have been diagnosed as having Autism, Social Emotional and Mental Health in Northumberland needs has been increasing year on year for the past 10 years. This demand for special school places equates to an average increase over this period to date of 7% each year (actual variation from year to year has been between 2% and 12%). There continues to be an increasing demand from parents for their children to be educated within special school provision both in and out of the county. It is also widely acknowledged nationally that there are significant financial pressures on mainstream schools in supporting SEND provision, not least due to school budget pressures and expectations on schools to fund the first £6k of support for each SEND learner with an EHCP.
8. Within these numbers, there has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people who have been identified with a primary special need of autism and/or social emotional and mental health needs. Northumberland has been successful in bidding for a special free school, the Gilbert Ward academy constructed through the DfE's free school programme for secondary age young people who have autism and social, emotional and mental health needs but this will not be completed until early 2023. The Dales School in Blyth and Ashington and Hillcrest School in Cramlington have also both had their provision increased recently. The next available school to expand to meet demand would be Atkinson House Special School. However, there is also a growing demand for SEMH provision for girls in Northumberland from Year 7 onwards.
9. Given the delay in the opening of the Gilbert Ward Academy and given the increasing demand outline above which evidences the need for additional SEMH places across the county, it is proposed that relocating Atkinson House to the vacant former Richard Coates CE Primary School building in Ponteland would provide additional capacity on an ongoing basis, rather than spending additional funding on a temporary arrangements to meet demand in the interim.

The additional capacity at the proposed site for Atkinson House Special school would also enable the school to expand its provision by moving from a single sex provision to co-educational, thus supporting the growing demand from girls diagnosed with SEMH.

The Consultation Process

10. Informal consultation commenced on 13 October and 1 December 2021, a six week period in school term-time, which is in line with DfE guidance. A consultation register of relevant stakeholders was drawn up and is included at Appendix 2 of this report.
11. A consultation document, including a questionnaire, was drawn up which set out the rationale, background information and implications of the proposal. This document was circulated directly to parents, staff, Governors and other stakeholders as demonstrated in the Consultation Register. The document was also published on the Council's website, on Twitter and Facebook and a notice highlighting the consultation displayed in the local library at Ponteland. In addition, an Atkinson House Special School Consultation 'padlet' was set up, which held the consultation document and frequently asked questions that arose from consultees during the consultation period; this was accessed 97 times during the consultation and the link from there to the consultation document used 189 times.
12. Officers held the following virtual meetings during the consultation period:
 - 18 October and 16 November - Ponteland Town Council
 - 4 November – Atkinson House Governing Body
 - 11 November – Atkinson House Staff
 - 17 November – Little Tinklers Nursery Manager

Summaries of these meetings are provided at para. 25 of this report, as well as a summary of the operational meetings held with Pele Trust.

13. It was hoped that a public event would be able to take place in the Ponteland area during the consultation period and a venue and a date had been arranged to be organised on an appointment basis. However, as a result of the rise in COVID-19 cases it was felt that it would not be possible to maintain the safety of Council staff across the course of the public event day, especially when attendees could not be compelled to wear masks and may also have not adhered to the time allotted to them. Whilst it would have been preferable to have been able to hold a public event, the Atkinson House Special School padlet referred to in para. 8 was developed to include animations and provided a useful interface between consultees and officers where it was possible to answer questions arising from consultees during the consultation period and therefore was a useful substitute for a public-facing event.

14. The questionnaire attached to the Consultation Document asked the following questions as follows:
- *Do you support the proposal to relocate Atkinson House Special School to a larger building in Ponteland to assist with providing additional specialist places for young people in Northumberland with SEMH needs with effect from September 2022?*
 - *Linked to the relocation of Atkinson House, do you support the proposal to change its provision from single sex to co-educational in order to provide additional specialist places for female students in Northumberland with SEMH needs with effect from September 2022?*
 - *If you have an alternative proposal to the relocation of Atkinson House Special School that you believe would achieve the additional places for young people with SEMH for September 2022, please outline it below.*
 - *Do you have any additional comments you wish the Council's Cabinet to consider when deciding on whether or not to approve further consultation on the proposals for Atkinson House Special School?*
15. Should Cabinet approve the publication of a statutory proposal to relocate Atkinson House Special School to a former school site in Ponteland and change its designation to co-educational, there would be a further four-week statutory formal consultation period during which time all interested parties would be able to submit comments either for or against the proposal. This would be published on 13 January closing on 10 February 2022. The outcomes of the formal consultation would be brought to Cabinet for a final decision on whether or not to implement the statutory proposal on 8 March 2022.

The following section of the report summarises the feedback from consultation used to inform the analysis and recommendations.

Feedback from Consultation

16. Summary of Feedback from the Governing Body of Atkinson House Special School

Governors unanimously agreed in principle to support the proposed transfer and the change to become a co-educational site.

Governors raised questions around the strategic wider vision for SEND across the county and how Atkinson House in particular would work with the Gilbert Ward Academy (Free School) when it opens.

Governors also raised questions regarding the delivery time of the project, particularly around the plan to relocate, associated costs of relocation, transition of students particularly the most vulnerable, funding to support the transition of the present students to Ponteland and preparation of any new students, including girls, in the summer term to ensure a smooth transition.

Governors had other questions included the contingency plan if the move could not take place in September 2022, any indicative data on potential student numbers, relationship with Gilbert Ward academy including admissions policy. Governors were also keen to ensure that arrangements to ensure safeguarding all students, traffic congestion, noise pollution and understanding and awareness of the needs of secondary age students with SEMH are put in place.

Governors would also have a desire to have the best possible facilities for their students and the same investment as other mainstream schools and would appreciate clarity around the proposed level of investment and the facilities being provided at the proposed site. They have also expressed a desire to so wish to replicate or continue access to Construction and Motor Vehicle Maintenance resources as part of this change.

Commentary

The Governing Body of Atkinson House Special School understand the need for additional places for young people in Northumberland with SEMH and are supportive of the proposal to relocate the school. Understandably, Governors are keen for specific aspects of the proposed relocation to be clarified, therefore the following answers their questions as far as is possible at this point in the process;

- The proposal to relocate Atkinson House Special School to larger premises has arisen as a result of a need to provide additional SEMH places for young people in Northumberland for September 2022 due to the delay in the opening of the Gilbert Ward Academy. However, this event has also offered the opportunity to create SEMH provision more centrally within the county where it can be more easily accessed by young people across the county, including from the west. This fits the Council's strategic aim to educate all children and young people as close to their home communities as possible. Furthermore, it is expected that Atkinson House Special School and Gilbert Ward Academy would work together collaboratively with respect to mutually offering support to students where the placement in either one of the schools breaks down for whatever reason.
- Officers in the Council's Capital team have begun initial work at risk on the project to relocate the school to Ponteland; early indications are that the relocation would be able to be achieved in time for students to be effectively transitioned to the new location. A high-level cost for the relocation and refurbishment of the building to make it suitable for the needs of SEMH students has been established and is provided at para. 31. The funding allocated to all education projects is based on work required to meet the needs of the relevant students; therefore, it is not feasible to compare one project to another in relation to funding allocated.

- Given that this proposal involves the relocation of a vulnerable cohort of young people, it is inevitable that the relocation should it be approved would cause anxiety to all students to a greater or lesser extent. The Council would provide advice and assistance to support staff to effectively transition students through its specialist inclusion service. However, as professionals it is also expected that staff at Atkinson House Special School have the skills and knowledge of their students to manage the transition with as little disruption as possible.
- Should the proposal to relocate the school not be approved, alternative placements for relevant students would need to be sought either in other Northumberland special schools (including Atkinson House at its current location) or at out of county establishments. Currently, out of county special school placements including transport cost in the region of £10,000 per place per annum more than provision within county.
- The Governors comments on wishing to engender good relationships with the school's neighbour through effective safeguarding measures which applies to all students who would be attending school in the area are noted, para. 24 sets out how these concerns raised by other consultees would be addressed. It should be noted that the headteacher of Atkinson House Special School has already noted in meetings with Ponteland Town Council and Little Tinklers Nursery that taxis bringing students to school could be directed to enter the premises at the top entrance of the school which is not shared, from the north end of Thornhill Road and thus avoiding the school traffic of Richard Coates CE Primary School and Little Tinklers Nursery. It is unclear why Governors believe either Atkinson House students or pupils at the adjacent primary and nursery would create noise pollution.
- Governors desire to raise awareness of the needs of young people with SEMH is understood but it would be expected that they and staff of the school would work collaboratively with their school neighbours and the wider community to build relationships and raise awareness and understanding.
- With respect the Governors desire to wish to replicate or continue access to Construction and Motor Vehicle Maintenance resources as part of the proposed relocation, there is an intention that students would continue to be able to access these facilities although be at an off-site location.

17. Summary of Feedback from the Staff Body of Atkinson House Special School

Staff generally welcome the proposed move to Ponteland and the consideration of co-education. Their reasons relate to the opportunity to create a building that is more fit for purpose and can offer additional places, and that no current specific provision for girls in Northumberland with SEMH.

Staff submitted several questions about the proposal, many of which mirror the Governors questions in relation to wider SEND strategy, phasing and

transition, contingency plans and student numbers which are addressed in the Commentary to para. 16.

Should the proposal be approved, it is expected that the headteacher and senior management team would assess what additional training needs would be required by staff in order for them to manage the different needs between boys and girls with regard to SEMH and indeed this work could take place at risk should approval be given by Cabinet in January 2022 to move to the next phase of formal consultation, with a final decision on the proposal being made in March 2022.

It is not feasible that Atkinson House Special School could operate from two sites should the proposal be approved even for the first term of 2022 to help transition due to the prohibitive costs of running two sites. Therefore, it is imperative that transition is effectively planned and carried out by staff with students over the period from the decision in March 2022, should the proposal be approved.

Staff also put forward additional ideas to the proposal which are addressed at para. 26. The full responses from staff are available in the Background Papers to this report.

18. Summary of Feedback from Pele Trust

The Pele Trust response was submitted by the Chief Executive Officer of the Trust, Mr Kieran McGrane on behalf of trustees. The response stated that it provided a singular view gained from discussions with the staff, Headteacher and governors from Richard Coates CE Primary Schools as well as all Pele Trust Headteachers and Board of Directors.

While Pele Trust supports the need for additional SEMH provision within Northumberland, it has concerns around the decision to co-locate Atkinson House Special School alongside a primary school, which they feel is wholly inappropriate, exemplified by the statement *“Given a free hand, would anyone consider placing an SEMH provision of predominantly 11-16 year old males immediately next to a primary school with the intention of sharing outdoor facilities. I believe the answer would be a resounding ‘No’.”*

The trust believes that the decision to identify the former Richard Coates building was based on an opportunity to use a vacant building. The trust suggests that Hexham Middle School is also vacant and is located within its own grounds which would remove some of the concerns about concerns about the current proposals. The trust encourages NCC to review the suitability of other sites for the relocation of Atkinson House Special School.

The Trust also asked the following questions:

1. Is it possible to adequately safeguard primary pupils if there is shared access to some parts of the site?
2. Is it possible to shield primary pupils/staff from exposure to bad language/inappropriate behaviour?
3. Is it possible to shield parents from exposure to bad language/inappropriate behaviour if students can leave the site?
4. Is there likely to be reputational damage to Richard Coates?

In summary, the trust stated it supports the drive to increase special school and SEMH provision within Northumberland. We would support this provision within Ponteland if it was on a secure site that is not shared with another school but firmly believe that the current proposals are unworkable and present significant concerns for the staff, pupils and parents of Richard Coates.

Commentary

The academies in the Pele Trust form part of the Ponteland Partnership. It includes Ponteland High School and 5 feeder primary academies; there are 8 schools and academies in total in the partnership.

As part of the reorganisation to the primary/secondary structure that took place in the partnership from 2017, Cabinet are reminded that the Council allocated funding of £52m for the reprovision of new buildings for 3 of the Pele Trust academies, the remodelling of 2 others and negotiated the swapping of the former Richard Coates CE Primary School building which was no longer suitable as a 1 form entry primary for the former building of Ponteland Primary School (1 of the recipients of a new building). That is why the former Richard Coates building is now available for alternative use.

In relation to the Trusts questioning of the appropriateness of an SEMH provision for young people located adjacent to a primary school, this demonstrates perhaps a lack of understanding of the characteristics of SEMH needs. Young people with SEMH are capable of taking GCSEs and vocational courses in the same way as their peers, but their special needs are linked to the way in which they are able to control their emotions and behaviour. Unlike some educational needs, SEMH is not a lifelong condition; all students currently on roll at Atkinson House Special School have an Education and Healthcare Plan which supports how their needs will be met by Atkinson House Special School and this is reviewed annually. Many of the young people on roll at Atkinson House have levels of anxiety which mean they are better suited to the small number of 8-10 students per classes at the school, rather than the normal 30 students per class in most schools.

It is true that the availability of the former Richard Coates building has provided an opportunity for Atkinson House Special School to expand the number of students it can educate and extend its designation to include girls. However, the rationale behind the proposal is based on the location of the building fairly central to the county in relation to population and with close proximity to excellent networks, and also offering the opportunity to serve the west of the county more effectively. While the Pele Trust suggests that the former Hexham Middle School is available, it is significantly further west than Ponteland. The statement that the building is in its own grounds appears to imply that young people with SEMH special needs should be kept away from other schools and/or the public, which is disappointing to hear from another educational establishment in the county.

In relation to the questions specifically posed by the Pele Trust;

- Safeguarding of its students is as much a priority for Atkinson House Special School as it is for the Pele Trust academies. It is envisaged that should approval be given for the relocation of Atkinson House, officers would work with the headteacher at the school, the leadership team of Richard Coates CE Primary and the management of Little Tinklers nursery and the council's health and safety advisers to draw up plans to ensure that appropriate safeguarding arrangements as part of the building project and that these were in place in advance of the relocation.
- The Trust asks if it is possible to shield pupils and staff from bad language and inappropriate behaviour. As stated above, it would be envisaged that the leadership teams of the relevant settings would work together to agree a mutually convenient timetabling structure that would reduce the opportunity for children and young people attending the settings to overhear one another. Any advice the Pele Trust could offer on how it manages incidents of bad language and inappropriate behaviour between the secondary age students at Ponteland High School and the primary aged children at Ponteland Primary would be welcomed by Atkinson House Special School staff. All students attending Atkinson House Special School (save those who in the future may be within walking distance of the school) are transported to and from the school in taxis, therefore there would be very rare occasions when students might leave the site, and these would be at times when children attending Richard Coates and Little Tinklers would be in their own buildings.
- With regard to the likelihood of reputational damage occurring to Richard Coates CE Primary School should the proposal be implemented, based on the latest available pupil data for 2020/21, only 21% of pupils on roll at the school reside in Ponteland catchments (10% living in Richard Coates catchment itself), while 77% of pupils attending live out of county. Given the likely reasons why the out of

county pupils attend the school, it is not envisaged that Richard Coates CE Primary would suffer a drop in pupils applying for a place at the school as a result of the relocation of Atkinson House Special School to the adjacent site.

- While the Pele Trust states that it supports the Council's aim to increase SEMH provision in Northumberland, it appears to be on the proviso that such additional places are not created in Ponteland. While it is understandable that the Trust has raised concerns regarding safeguarding etc. it is not beyond the capabilities of any of the settings concerned to work collaboratively together on an ongoing basis to ensure that sufficient and workable measures are put in place to give sufficient comfort that the children and young people for whom they have responsibility are well safeguarded.

19. Summary of feedback from Ponteland Town Council

The response from Ponteland Town Council stated that councillors have listened to the general public, held a zoom meeting with the Pele Trust and made an 8:30 a.m. site visit to both Richard Coates old and new schools accompanied by a member of the Pele Trust.

The Council would not be averse to the relocation of Atkinson House if a more suitable area could be found in or around Ponteland.

Councillors have several concerns with the proposal:

1. Not a suitable location due to proximity to a Primary school, nursery, elderly residents in the cottages opposite and close proximity of the shopping centre
2. Regarding how the schools will be able to operate safely on a shared site – Richard Coates Primary school pupils arrive by various means, walk from all directions and the proposal is for taxis to drop Atkinson House students off – safeguarding is a priority.
3. Current practice at Atkinson House doesn't seem to reflect the suggested model in meetings. E.g., currently pupils walk into school, but the proposed model is taxi and students walked into school.
4. Difficulty in dividing school playing fields - concerns about shared use (Primary school use for around 80% of the day), multi-use playground
5. Communication received from a parent(s) that consideration will be given to remove pupils from school and nursery, therefore concerns over the future of the school.
6. Condition of the former Richard Coates Middle School site/building and being fit for purpose – consider other options, e.g. Hexham, Kirkley Hall
7. Increased traffic on Thornhill Road

Commentary

With regard to the concerns set out in the town council's response;

- The former Richard Coates building is a suitable location for the relocation of Atkinson House Special School; it is a former school and therefore highly suitable to continue to be a school; students on roll at Atkinson House Special School have SEMH needs and do not have physical disabilities; sufficient safeguarding arrangements would be able to be put in place through collaboration between all 3 settings at the Thornhill Road site; students are transported onto and off site in taxis and therefore it would be very rarely that students would be off-site.
- It is disappointing that Ponteland Town Council has chosen to use second-hand information from the Pele Trust as part of its submission to this consultation with regard to the notion that students walk into school as a matter of course as it appears they may be misinformed. In fact, on the day Pele Trust visited Atkinson House Special School, the visitors saw two students walk into school; the headteacher at Atkinson House explained to the visitors that one student lives 400 metres from school, while the other student lives close by in Seaton Delaval and is able to be dropped outside of school by a parent, which is in fact represents a saving to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.
- Currently, the playing field area allocated to Richard Coates CE Primary School, which has the capacity for 420 students, includes the former playing fields that were allocated to Richard Coates CE Middle School when it was located on its original site with capacity for 480 students and the former playing fields of Ponteland Primary when it had a capacity for 300 pupils. As the proposed number of students on roll at Atkinson House Special School is 100, there is clearly sufficient playing field area for the two settings to share or split. It is envisaged that should approval for the relocation of Atkinson House be given, that a Management Agreement between the school and Pele Trust would be able to be put in place reasonably easily setting out the principles, shared maintenance costs and timetabling arrangements agreeable to the two settings. Alternatively, a fence would be able to be erected should either or both settings decide that a clear designated playing field area for both schools was preferable.
- The impact on the viability of Richard Coates CE Primary is set out in the commentary to the response from Pele Trust at para. 14.
- As with any relocation capital project, consideration would be given to the potential requirement to undertake any remodelling and/or refurbishment at the former Richard Coates building to ensure the that Atkinson House Special school would be able to operate in its capacity as a provider of SEND provision. The full extent of requirements would be known once further investigation and detailed work to form the requisite plans is undertaken which are subject Cabinet's approval of this proposal. However, the former Richard Coates building themselves are in relatively good condition as it was an operational

school only 12 months ago. As there is a surplus of space at the proposed site compared to Atkinson House's current arrangements, it is determined that the former Richard Coates building would have sufficient accommodation for the school's requirements.

- During the Council's virtual meeting with Ponteland Town Council on 16 November 2021, the headteacher at Atkinson House Special School explained to Councillors that he would be happy to direct taxi operators to enter the school site at its topmost entrance from the north end of Thornhill Road, thus avoiding Atkinson House traffic increasing the apparently already difficult school traffic situation between Richard Coates CE Primary School and Little Tinkler's Nursery.

20. Response of CE and RC Dioceses to consultation

The Newcastle Diocesan Board of Education (NDEB) responded to the consultation that it recognises the rapidly growing need for the provision of specialist education in Northumberland and would be supportive of the right provision in the most suitable location.

However, the NDEB has raised concerns over the proposed shared use of the site with regard to safeguarding concerns, including :- location of Atkinson House Special School next to a the nursery provision which still shares a school field and MUGA with the newly located Richard Coates Primary School; how the shared access to the 3 buildings on Thornhill Road would be segregated without significant work and how the concerns regarding the informal smoking area and significant level of inappropriate language experienced by the headteacher of Richard Coates CE Primary and the CEO of Pele Trust on their visit to Atkinson House Special School in November 2021 would be addressed.

In summary, the NDEB does not object in principle to the proposed relocation of the provision provided sufficient adaptations and investment in the site ensure adequate security and protections for neighbouring provisions. Therefore, at this time NDEB is unable to support the proposal as it currently stands although if further detail, information and clarification on appropriate mitigations of the risks posed could be shared, the NDEB would review this position.

Commentary

As the Diocese of Newcastle has two membership positions on the Pele Trust governance structure, it is perhaps not surprising that NDEB would currently support the position of the trust in its opposition to the relocation of Atkinson House Special School. In relation to NDEB's statement that it would require the details of how the concerns it has raised with regard to safeguarding issues could be addressed, these would be developed as part of the building project should the proposal be approved. Para. 31 provides further information on the proposed building project.

21. Response of local MP (Guy Opperman)

No response received.

22. Response from other local authorities

No responses were received from Newcastle City Council.

23. Summary of Feedback from students of Atkinson House Special School

Staff in Atkinson House Special School have initiated discussions with the students on the proposal for relocation and the change in designation of the school and their comments were noted. Their comments included:

- The majority of students were excited about moving to a new building, which was a school not a house.
- They would like to see the same facilities they have now but improved (sports hall, gym, Art, Science, Construction and MVM)
- They would love a MUGA and 3G football pitch (even 5-a-side).
- Outside facilities were asked for, including a climbing frame and adventure part for Key Stage 3 and a Skate Park for Key Stage 4;
- They hope for nice aesthetics – nice carpet, chairs and tables that do not wobble as they work, nice paint on walls with a feature wall like it is now.
- They would like a sensory room.
- Better Wi-fi for working on Chromebooks.

Some students also had some areas of concern, including:

- Will the school be too big with lots of students? Will I get lost?
- A minority of students do not like change and are anxious about why the school has to move:

In relation to student's thoughts about the redesignation of their school to become co-educational, some comments were:

- There was a mixed view regarding the inclusion of girls.
- Some younger students just wanted to stay the same, without girls.
- Most students felt it was fair that girls were allowed to come, because they do not have the same offer of provisions them.

The full responses from students are available in the Background Papers to this report.

24. It should be noted that the purpose of the Council's questionnaire was to seek the views of consultees on a qualitative basis in order to inform the decision-making process of the Council's Cabinet, and it is not the intention that these results are used as a referendum on the proposal.

2,016 consultees were sent a link to the informal consultation document and questionnaire directly, while a total of 305 responses were received via the

consultation document. The breakdown of the number of responses against Q1 and Q2 by type of consultee is provided in the table below:

305 responses (297 submitted by online survey)							
Relocation of Atkinson House Special School				Co-education in Atkinson House Special School			
Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
96	31.48%	209	68.52%	150	49.18%	155	50.82%

The main reasons given by consultees in support of the proposed relocation and change to designation were:

- There is a requirement for the expansion of provision.
- The correct learning environment is needed for students (including ...and a positive impact to the community).
- General support for the proposal.
- A reduction in travel is needed.
- Introduction of provision for girls will develop students' social skills.

The main reasons given by consultees against the proposed relocation and change of designation were:

- Safeguarding concerns / location is inappropriate with the location near Richard Coates Primary School and Little Tinklers Nursery;
- Traffic congestion / parking concerns / traffic infrastructure concerns
- Building is not fit for purpose (hence why Richard Coates Primary School moved, so why is it suddenly fit for purpose for SEN children?)
- Anti-social behaviour around the community;
- If there is such a demand for SEND provision, why not have more schools to cater for pupils; keep the Seghill site as well as the Ponteland site, why relocate rather than have more – leave current Atkinson House Special School students in their current location?

The full responses from consultees who responded to the questionnaire are provided in the Background Papers of the report. Cabinet should note that some comments from a very small number of consultees have been redacted from the responses as they are offensive to young people with special educational needs and their families.

Commentary

The reasons given by consultees who expressed support for the proposal are in line with the rationale put forward by the Council as part of consultation. Around 40 parents of students at Atkinson House Special School responded to the consultation and all were in support of the proposal. Some parents in particular stated that the introduction of provision for girls at the school would be more representative of the world into which they will enter and so help to prepare them to be good citizens.

With regard to consultees who did not support the proposal, it is understandable that parents, staff of Richard Coates and Little Tinklers, and local residents may have concerns that young people in an older age group would be in an adjacent building to the site of Richard Coates CE Primary School and Little Tinklers nursery. These concerns could be generally expressed as safeguarding issues and similar concerns were raised by parents during the consultation in Ponteland to reorganise the partnership from 3-tier to 2-tier, particularly in relation to how the shared site of Ponteland High School and Ponteland Primary school would work (the 2 Pele Trust schools on Callerton Lane educate children from nursery age to 18, as well as the public having access to Ponteland Leisure centre which also shares the site).

The staff of Atkinson House Special School are as concerned for the safeguarding of the vulnerable students who attend the school as they are to ensure that their students do not cause offence or concern through any expressed behaviours to staff, parents and children attending their neighbouring settings. The headteacher of Atkinson House Special School has already agreed during consultation that he would arrange that the taxis transporting his students to the top entrance of the site (which would be for Atkinson House only and not shared with the other settings) to enter from the north end of Thornhill Road; this would avoid the need for the taxis to pass children and parents entering the other two settings further down the road at their shared entrance. The Headteacher has expressed his desire throughout the consultation to work collaboratively with his educational neighbours to ensure that all parties are happy with the safeguarding measures put in place for all the children and young people educated in those settings.

As well as the headteacher of Atkinson House Special School's proposal to reduce any impact that the taxis would have on traffic on Thornhill Road above, it should be noted that prior to reorganisation of the Ponteland Partnership to the primary/secondary system, Richard Coates CE Middle School (as it was) had the capacity for 480 students, with buses and parents in cars arriving to drop off and pick up students during term-time, while Ponteland First School (as it was) had 300 students, as well as the nursery setting with similar traffic issues. Students of Atkinson House Special School would be transported to school by taxi (currently 17 taxis drop off and pick up during term-time). With the modification of the journey suggested by the headteacher and the actual number of vehicles arriving with Atkinson House Special School students, it is unlikely that local residents would be any further impacted by traffic issues than they already are through the traffic issues caused by the transport arrangements of pupils at Richard Coates CE Primary and Little Tinklers nursery.

The design plan for the remodelling of the former Richard Coates building would include appropriate modifications to ensure that the buildings and site would be secure both in terms of Atkinson House students being unable to

enter the sites of Richard Coates or Little Tinklers, and vice versa. Further information on buildings is set out at para. 31.

The rationale for the relocation of Richard Coates CE Primary School to the former building of Ponteland Primary School (which in turn has relocated to new provision at the shared Callerton Road site) was based on its reorganisation from a middle school with capacity for 480 students and to a primary school with a maximum of 420 students. Furthermore, middle schools in Northumberland are deemed secondary, therefore the former Richard Coates building had additional facilities such as laboratories that are not used or required as part of the primary curriculum. In short, the former Richard Coates building was not fit for purpose as a primary school and the opportunity arose for the school to relocate to the former Ponteland Primary building, which was only circa 10 years old. In short, the former Richard Coates building is in good repair and would be suitable subject to modification to educate young people with SEMH aged 11 to 16.

Currently, none of the Atkinson House Special School students on roll live in Ponteland, although they do live in all areas of the county. As they are transported directly onto site, they would not generally be able to engage with the wider community during the school day. It is possible that 1 or 2 students may visit a local shop occasionally for snacks, but this would be with the knowledge of the school as part of the management of their individual plans. Atkinson House Special School students have a specific SEMH special educational need and would raise no more concerns to the general public than any other teenage students in the Ponteland area.

While there is a growing demand for SEMH places in the county, demand is not currently enough for Atkinson House Special School to have two viable sites (one in Seghill and the proposed site in Ponteland) especially with the opening of the Gilbert Ward Academy in September 2023. However, the current site of Atkinson House Special School at Seghill has too many constraints for it to be extended.

25. Summary of feedback received via meetings

Council officers held a number of virtual and in-person meetings with the specific groups during the six week consultation period. Summaries of the notes taken at the meetings are set out below.

- Summary of the meeting with the staff of Atkinson House Special School.

The online meeting also included representatives from teaching and non-teaching unions. highlighted that the staff are ready and know they need to support their students through a planned transition process.

Staff members were given a presentation online and then had the opportunity to ask questions. The staff had several prepared questions which were answered, and a full account are contained in the full notes of the meeting are included in the Background Papers to this report.

- Summary of the meeting with the Governing Body of the Atkinson House Special School: -

At the virtual meeting, the Governing Body confirmed its support of the Headteacher, staff and students. The Governing Body also confirmed its support for the proposal, and also similar questions to those included in the written response which are addressed at para. 13.

- Summary of the meetings with Ponteland Town Council

The Council held 2 meetings with Ponteland Town Council during the consultation period, the second meeting being held to accommodate councillors who were not able to attend the first meetings. Questions and answers from these meetings were included in the Frequently Asked Questions on the Northumberland [padlet](#) website as described in para. 8.

Both meetings with Ponteland Town Council were positive, as although Councillors asked relevant questions about the need for places, traffic concerns and similar, the answers they received appeared to be satisfactory in allaying those concerns. Some of the Councillors expressed their support of the proposal and the good work that Atkinson House Special School is doing with its students. The full notes and responses to questions are included in the Background Papers to this report.

However, the written response received from Ponteland Town Council relayed a somewhat different view of the proposal to that which had been captured at the meetings. As noted in the town council's written response, they also met with representatives of Pele Trust before submitting their response and as stated in para. 16, it appears that this meeting has influenced their view of the proposal negatively.

- Summary of virtual and in-person meetings with Pele Trust

There were also informational virtual and in person meetings with the Pele Trust representatives, local elected member and the local Governing Body of the neighbouring Richard Coates Primary School. Specific safeguarding concerns were discussion as was the impact on traffic and the timing of the school day in order for Pele Trust to fully understand the operational impact of the proposal. These were operational discussions, therefore no formal notes were taken.

- Summary of virtual meeting with Little Tinklers Nursery

The Manager of Little Tinklers raised concerns regarding safeguarding arrangements, traffic congestion and transport arrangements around the site in general. Regarding transport arrangements children's drop-off and collection times would mean there are a lot of people on and around the site at the same time.

At the end of the meeting, the Manager stated that she had been somewhat reassured by some of the information she had received from the Headteacher of Atkinson House Special School and officers.

26. Alternative Models and general comments received

Around 6 variations of alternative models were suggested by consultees during consultation. Alternative models or variations with the same basic principles have been themed and are set out below:

Alternative Model Theme A

A number of parents and staff of Atkinson House Special School suggested that a sixth form would be a welcome addition to the school as an alternative route for the students post-16.

Commentary: The comments of these consultees are noted but there would be no plans to introduce a sixth form to Atkinson House Special School at this point.

Alternative Model Theme B

A number of consultees suggested that the current Atkinson House Special School building at Seghill should be extended by using the funding proposed to remodel the former Richard Coates site.

Commentary:

The current Atkinson House Special School Building is not able to be extended due to site constraints i.e. the school is built between old mine workings.

Alternative Model Theme C

A number of consultees suggested that Atkinson House Special School could relocate to other buildings other than the former Richard Coates Building. These alternative buildings and the commentary on their suitability are as follows:

- The former Ponteland High School;

Commentary – This building would be too big for the Governing Body of Atkinson House to maintain themselves and in any event it is in train to be demolished very soon.

- Seaton Sluice Middle School site (depending on outcome of the Seaton Valley consultation;

Commentary – Should the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle be approved, it would not be implemented until September 2024. The additional places for young people with

SEMH that are proposed to be created at Atkinson House Special School are required for September 2022.

- The former Hexham Middle School building.

Commentary – One of the key reasons why the former Richard Coates building is the proposed site to relocate Atkinson House Special School is its central position to good road networks running north and south, and east and west across the county. Hexham Middle School lies too far to the west for this to be a viable alternative to the proposed Ponteland site.

- Empty buildings on Bell Villas.

Commentary – It is doubtful whether these buildings are already in the ownership of the Council. Furthermore, they are highly unlikely to be better alternatives for the provision of education than a former school building.

- Kirkley Hall

Commentary - Kirkley Hall forms part of Northumberland College and is not in the ownership of the Council.

- Use the ARP's at Astley High School and Blyth

Commentary - The needs of the students on roll at Atkinson House Special School are not able to be met in the ARPs at these 2 high schools.

- Is one of the many empty school buildings in Northumberland not more suitable?

Commentary – Other buildings in the ownership of the Council were considered as potential alternative sites to where Atkinson House Special School could relocate in order to increase its places and offer provision to girls with SEMH in the county. However, in relation to size, suitability, condition and location, the former Richard Coates building is the best option to meet the needs of students of Atkinson House.

Alternative Model Theme D

A number of consultees proposed alternative sites where a new school building could be constructed for Atkinson House Special School, including

- Top of Darras Hall – plenty fields that can be utilised and built on
- Ashington / Blyth / Cramlington areas have many unused premises which could be used more safely for the students and local community. They would also benefit from regeneration

- Outside of Ponteland using a number of vacant brownfield sites located across Northumberland.
- A property near the golf club in Ponteland, which has been empty for years.

Commentary: It is unlikely that any of the above suggestions would be suitable alternatives to the proposed use of the former Richard Coates building as the land or premises are not in the ownership of the Council, planning permission would be an unknown risk and the costs of a new build would be prohibitive compared to the remodelling of an existing school building.

Alternative Model Theme E

Atkinson House Special School to remain in Seghill and another SEMH school to be created elsewhere in the county, perhaps for girls only:

Commentary: While the need for additional SEMH places in the county is growing, with the opening of the Gilbert Ward Academy in Blyth in September 2023 there would not be sufficient numbers of students to make 3 schools viable at this time. In particular, while the need for SEMH places for girls is growing, there would not be enough demand for a dedicated SEMH school for girls only.

Alternative Model Theme F

Some consultees suggested alternative properties for the relocation of Atkinson House Special school that are outside Northumberland.

- The old Sage Headquarters
- Dunston Hill Primary School

Commentary: The strategic aim of the Council is to provide school places as close to the home address of children and young people within Northumberland. As neither of these properties is within the county, they are unsuitable on those grounds as well as the fact they are not in the ownership of the Council and would require significant funding to make them suitable for the education of young people with SEMH aged 11 to 16.

Commentary on Consultation Feedback and Conclusion

27. As with most consultations involving proposals for schools, this informal consultation has been informative and emotive. It was expected that the proposal would attract strong views from some quarters and most of the concerns and questions aired by consultees have been fair and understandable. However, Cabinet should note that this consultation attracted a number of offensive comments towards this vulnerable group of young people in the County, albeit submitted by a very small number of consultees who responded.

As stated, the concerns around safeguarding raised by many consultees during consultation are real and valid. Should the proposal to relocate Atkinson House Special School to the former Richard Coates building be approved, it is suggested that representatives from the 3 settings that would be located adjacent to one another at Thornhill Road are involved where appropriate in the development of suitable arrangements for safeguarding and that this collaborative work continues for the benefits of all children and young people receiving care and education at the site.

Many consultees have also been concerned about the impact of increased traffic as a result of the proposal. However, as stated elsewhere in the report, given the proposal of the Headteacher of Atkinson House Special School that taxis transporting his students can be directed into school from the north end of Thornhill Road, thus avoiding adding to the issues at the south end of the road, and that there are likely only to be 20 or so taxis dropping off and picking up students in term-time, there is likely to be little or no impact on the current traffic situation in the area.

Given the suggested amelioration of the above factors, the rationale for the proposal and its support from the Governing Body and staff of Atkinson House Special School and the majority of its parents, Cabinet are recommended to approve the relocation of the school to the former Richard Coates building with effect from September 2022.

Implications of the proposal

28. Implications for students and timeline

If approved to relocate, the school would open in its new building in Ponteland in September 2022. Following the decision, staff would begin a transition period working closely with the students and their families to prepare them for the relocation, including organised visits to the new site.

To aid in the transition, the Governing Body have intimated that they would like to change the name of the school that would reflect the designation of co-educational.

29. Implications for staff

Should Cabinet approve Atkinson House Special School to change its designation to co-educational, there may be a need to employ additional staff to meet the needs of the additional student numbers and its re-designation as co-educational.

30. Transport

If the relocation of the school is approved, all students attending would be transport onto site. This is currently achieved through taxis which carry one or more pupils, save for the two students highlighted at para. in the commentary on the Pele Trust feedback.

Based on the current cohort of students on roll at the school, the initial cost of home to school transport to Ponteland would increase by just over £122k p.a. However, the majority of these students are based in the South East of the county and it is expected that over time they would be resident more in the central and west areas of the county. Furthermore, if the proposal to relocate Atkinson House Special School is not approved there is a potential that given that other special schools in the county are at capacity, out of county places would need to be commissioned for students with SEMH; currently the average cost of an out of county placement including transport costs is £10,000 more per annum than the cost of a place with transport in a Northumberland specialist provision.

31. Buildings Implications

During the informal consultation period work has been undertaken to determine the scope of works required for the relocation of Atkinson House Special School to Thornhill Road Ponteland. High-level suitability and capacity studies have been completed in order to provide a cost estimate on any refurbishment and remodelling works required to meet the needs of the students on the roll of Atkinson House.

The buildings themselves are in relatively good condition having been an operational school only 12 months prior. The site and buildings also allow for all the needs of the current pupils to be met as well as the opportunity to expand the provision for additional pupils. The school was originally built for nearly 500 pupils and the roll of Atkinson is currently 71 pupils with the potential for this to increase to 100 places over time. The additional capacity will also allow the local authority to look at the potential to collocate other services that support the special educational needs of the pupils attending Atkinson House.

It is estimated that the capital works required to undertake the relocation will be in the region of c.£2.5m. It is worth noting that Project/Building costs are estimates and should be treated as draft as they are subject to further detailed work should the approval be implemented. Should Cabinet approve consultation, further work to identify detailed costs would be carried out and reported to Cabinet with the outcomes of the consultation. However, in order to form a further cost position, prior to Cabinet approval this detailed work will have to be undertaken at risk at an estimated cost of c.£250k.

It is worth noting that the ex-Richard Coates buildings (and associated land) form part of a Church Supplemental Agreement with Richard Coates CofE Primary School and are currently under a lease to the Pele Trust. The buildings and land are in the process of being transferred back to the Local Authority following Richard Coates move into the adjacent school buildings previously occupied by Ponteland Primary School.

32. Sport and recreation

It is important for the physical and mental wellbeing of students at Atkinson House Special School that they are able to have access to appropriate sporting facilities.

Should Cabinet approve the relocation of the school to the proposed Ponteland site, officers would wish to work with the Pele Trust to develop a share use agreement in relation to the use of the playing fields that currently form part of the 125-year lease to the trust.

Implications arising out of the report

Policy:	These proposals are consistent with the Council's corporate priority that all residents should achieve and realise their potential
Finance and value for money	<p>An estimated budget of £2.5m will be required to undertake the refurbishment works to the Richard Coates buildings and site. The cost of the project will be funded from £6,693,625 gross capital allocation for 2022/23 to support Special Educational Needs.</p> <p>Cabinet is also requested to allocate a budget of £250K from the above total budget to fund design and feasibility works at risk, as if the project doesn't proceed through to implementation the expenditure would be a revenue cost to the council.</p> <p>It is expected that transport costs would be likely to increase due to the relocation and the additional pupils accessing provision at the new site. However, some costs would be offset by some pupils not having to undertake as long journeys to school as currently, while different arrangements for more effective transport of pupils to the new site would be explored. Should Cabinet approve consultation, work to identify detailed costs would be carried out and reported to Cabinet with the outcomes of the consultation</p>
Legal	DfE Guidelines on non-statutory consultation (pre-publication) have been adhered to as part of this informal consultation process.
Procurement	Technical advisers and the appointment of a contractor to carry out the refurbishment works has been approved through the use of the NEEPO framework through direct award, due the timescales required to deliver the project for the start of the academic year September 2022.
Human Resources:	Should approval for Atkinson House to change its designation to co-educational, there may be a need

	to employ additional staff to meet the needs of the expanded service and the girls who attend.
Property	The former Richard Coates site is in the ownership of the Council.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Should Cabinet approve informal consultation, and Equalities Impact Assessment would be initiated in conjunction with the consultation process and updated following the outcomes of such consultation.
Risk Assessment	A Risk Assessment would be carried out should Cabinet approve this proposal to go ahead.
Crime & Disorder	This report has considered Section 1 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
Customer Considerations:	The proposal set out in this report is based upon a desire to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families in Northumberland.
Carbon Reduction	It is not envisaged that the processes set out within this report will have any impact on positive or negative on carbon reduction.
Consultation	This report has been considered by the Executive Director for Adults and Children's Services and the Member for Children's Services.
Wards	Seghill with Seaton Delaval Ponteland North

33. Background papers

Report of the Executive Director of Adult and Children's Services, 13 October 2021
Proposals for Atkinson House School

Feedback from consultees 13 October to 1 December 2021

Notes of virtual meetings held during consultation

Report Sign Off

Finance Officer	JW
Monitoring Officer/Legal	SB
Executive Director of Children's Services	CMC
Chief Executive	DL

Portfolio Holder(s)	GRT
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Report Author: Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources

Sue.Aviston@northumberland.gov.uk

01670 622281

34. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

In carrying out the consultation set out in this report, the Council has acted in compliance with Data Protection Act 1998 via the Council's Data Protection Policy

Specifically,

- Data gathered during this consultation process has been dealt with fairly - e.g. the responses from members of the public have been anonymised, whilst those responding within a public role have been identified e.g. Chairs of Governors, Dioceses and so on.
- The data and information gathered during consultation has been used to assist in informing the recommendations set out in this report and will not be used for any other purpose, i.e. it will not be shared with another service area or any third party.
- The data and information gathered has been limited to that which would assist in informing the recommendations set out that will arise from this consultation.

28.2 The Council has set out how it deals with information received as part of consultation in the Council's Privacy Notice, at

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/About/Contact/Information.aspx#privacynotices> .

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Consultation Document

Appendix 2 - Consultation Register

Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact Assessment

Consultation Document



Northumberland
County Council

Proposals on the Relocation and change to Designation for Atkinson House School



**13 October 2021 –
01 December 2021**

<mailto:educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk>

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If you require a large print version of this document or a translation into another language please call 01670 623611 or

educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk

Introduction

Northumberland County Council is consulting on making changes to Atkinson House School and we would like to hear your views.

As a parent/carer, member of staff or a member of the community, you may feel you will be impacted by these proposals and therefore this consultation offers you the opportunity to have your say and to submit your views for consideration by the Council before any decisions on whether or not to make the changes are made.

Therefore, I hope that you will take this opportunity to respond to the consultation and I look forward to reading your comments.

Cath McEvoy-Carr

Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Northumberland County Council

What are the reasons for the proposed changes to Atkinson House School?

Atkinson House School offers specialist educational provision in Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs for secondary aged male students aged 11 –16 years old. Atkinson House school is currently the only dedicated SEMH provision in Northumberland.

Over the last 10 years in Northumberland, the number of children and young people being identified with Autism and SEMH needs has been increasing significantly. More female students are also being identified with SEMH needs from Year 7 onwards. To address this increasing need, the Council has been adding more accommodation at other special schools to support additional places and there is also a new academy school opening in Blyth in 2023 specifically for Autism and SEMH needs.

However, ahead of the new school opening the Council requires further additional places for young people with SEMH needs within Northumberland in order to ensure they are able to have their educational needs met closer to their home communities, rather than having to travel longer distances to schools in other local authorities.

Alongside this consultation, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is being carried out to assess what impact the proposed changes could have on identified groups; this will include the impact of the proposal on current Atkinson House students not just of the relocation, but of the proposal to make it co-educational. Other groups may include staff, parents/carers and members of the local community in Ponteland. This EIA will also be provided to the Council's Cabinet along with the results of the consultation.

What are the proposed changes for Atkinson House School?

As a specialist SEMH provision, the Council has identified that Atkinson House School has the necessary skills within its staffing body and the right curriculum to assist with addressing the need for additional places for both male and female students identified with SEMH. The Governing Body of the school is also supportive of these changes. However, the scale of the need for these additional number of places required means that the current site of the school would not be suitable for expansion. Therefore, the proposed changes for Atkinson House would be:

- 1. Relocate Atkinson House School to a former school building in Ponteland;**
- 2. Change the designation of the school from male students only (single sex) to co-educational i.e. mixed gender to allow places to be allocated to female students**

Given that these proposals include both a change in location and the change to co-educational provision, it is expected that the Governing Body of the school would also want to change the name of the school; students and parents/carers would be asked for their own ideas for the new name, should the proposed changes be approved to go ahead.

What impact would these proposed changes have on current students?

Staff at Atkinson House will discuss with parents and carers how they will manage the change in the location of the school and the change to co-educational on individual students and you can provide them with your comments. Details of how a member of staff will contact you can be found later in this document. You are also able to provide comments on the questionnaire linked from this document.

Would my child still receive transport to the proposed new site?

Transport for individual students is always arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. Transport of the current students on roll at Atkinson House School is provided by the County Council and the current arrangements for the transport of current and future students would continue except they would be dropped off and picked up from the site in Ponteland.

What are the details of the proposed new site?

A former school site in Ponteland has been identified as a suitable new building for Atkinson House. The building is larger than the current Atkinson house building and therefore has the space to increase the number of school places that can be offered. The additional space will also offer the opportunity for staff to further enhance the school curriculum.

The building is already owned by the Council and having been recently occupied it is in a good state of repair. As such, while some work would be needed to make it suitable for the needs of Atkinson House students, this work would be fairly limited and therefore costs are expected to be reasonable. There would also be removal costs to the new site. The Council would also ensure that should Atkinson House relocate to Ponteland, students would have access to playing fields.

During this consultation, an assessment of these costs will be made, and provided to the Council to assist them with making a decision on whether or not to approve the changes.

How many additional places would be added to Atkinson House if it moves to Ponteland?

The current Atkinson House building has the capacity for 80 students and there were 75 on roll in January 2021. During this consultation, work will be undertaken to identify the specific number of additional places that would be required for young people in the county for September 2022, and this would be included in any formal statutory proposal to increase places and subsequently the school's planned

admission number (PAN) would be increased to match this number. However, initial data review indicates that it is unlikely that the number of additional spaces required would be more than 20 and given the additional space in the proposed new site in Ponteland, it is expected that the additional places would be more than comfortably accommodated.

If approved, when would Atkinson House relocate?

If approved to relocate, Atkinson House School would open in its new building in Ponteland in **September 2022**.

Admission Arrangements

There would be no change to the way in which students are admitted to Atkinson House as its primary educational provision will continue to be for secondary age students with SEMH, except that female students with SEMH would be able to be allocated a place at the school it is deemed suitable to meet their needs.

Would there be any implications for staff of Atkinson House?

All staff currently employed by Atkinson House would transfer to the new site, should the changes be approved although some may have longer or shorter journeys there. Due to the anticipated increase in pupil numbers, it is likely that there would be an increase in the number of school staff required to support students, so there could be additional bringing employment opportunities.

Discussions with the Governing Body and with the Trades Unions are also being undertaken as part of this consultation to discuss any implications of the proposed changes for staff. The Council is also holding meetings with staff and trades unions during consultation.

Sport and Recreation

The Council would ensure that students at Atkinson House were able to access suitable sports facilities at the proposed new location in Ponteland.

Alternative Proposals

If you have an alternative suggestion as to how the Council could achieve the additional places required for young people with SEMH for September 2022 that you would like the Council to consider - you can set out your alternative suggestion in the questionnaire linked at the end of this document.

How can I find out more about this proposal?

If you are a parent or carer of a young person currently on roll at Atkinson House School, a member of staff will arrange a time to telephone you directly during the week beginning 15th November to talk about what the proposals would mean for your child specifically and for you to register your comments with them. You are also able to complete the questionnaire accompanying this document (see section '[How can I submit my views about this proposal?](#)' below).

Meetings for staff and the Governing Body of Atkinson House have been arranged as follows:

Governors only meeting – Thursday 4 November 2021 at 4:00 p.m.

An invitation to a virtual meeting will be sent to Governors directly ahead of the meeting

Staff and staff representatives only meeting – Thursday 11 November 2021 at 3:30 p.m.

An invitation to the appropriate virtual meeting will be sent directly to staff ahead of the meeting.

It is the aim of the Council to hold an event during the consultation period where parents/carers and members of the public would have the opportunity to speak face to face to Council officers and the Senior Leadership Team of Atkinson House about this proposal. This event would need to be managed in line with COVID safety measures. When organised and if a face to face meeting continues to be possible, parents and other stakeholders will be contacted directly and the event will be advertised on the Council's website with instructions on how you may attend in COVID safe conditions.

How can I submit my views about this proposal?

A six-week consultation (school weeks) on the proposal to relocate Atkinson House to a site in Ponteland and to change its designation to co-educational began on **Wednesday 13 October and ends at midnight on 1 December 2021.**

The Council and the Governing Body of Atkinson House are keen to hear your views on the proposal, and also to learn if you have any alternative proposals that could bring the same benefits that have been identified in this document.

A link to a questionnaire is attached to the end of this document; please complete the electronic questionnaire if you can. However, if you or someone you know would prefer to send a hard copy, please request a printed form by contacting

educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk stating that you require a printed survey form for the proposals for Atkinson House consultation (13.10.21 – 01.12.21).

To return your completed form, please send to:

School Organisation and Resources Team

Children's Services,

County Hall

Morpeth

Northumberland

NE61 2EF

At the end of this consultation, all feedback received will be considered by the Council before deciding on whether or not to move to the next step, which is statutory consultation.

Thank you for participating in this consultation

The Consultation Response Form

The consultation response form below is a duplicate of the Citizen Space survey so you can think about the questions and your response before you log on to complete the online survey [here](#).

Consultation on proposals for Atkinson House School

Overview

Northumberland County Council is consulting on making changes to Atkinson House School and we would like to hear your views.

Firstly, if you are a parent or carer of a young person currently on roll at Atkinson House, please be assured that these proposed changes will not affect your child's place at the school or their transport entitlement to the school if they are eligible.

As a parent/carer, member of staff or a member of the community, you may feel you will be impacted by these proposals and therefore this consultation offers you the opportunity to have your say and to submit your views for consideration by the Council before any decisions on whether or not to make the changes are made.

Therefore, I hope that you will take this opportunity to respond to the consultation and I look forward to reading your comments.

Cath McEvoy-Carr

Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Northumberland County Council

Introduction

1 What is your name? (Optional)

2 What is your email address? (Optional)

If you enter your email address then you will automatically receive an acknowledgement email when you submit your response.

3 Please select your role

(Required)

Please select only one item

- Parent of a child in Atkinson House
- Governor in Atkinson House
- Staff member in Atkinson House
- Resident / member of the community living in the area served by Atkinson House
- Member of a Parish Council in area covered by Atkinson House
- Other

4 If you answered 'other' to question 3 please provide details below

The consultation document referenced is this document

5 Do you support the proposal to relocate Atkinson House to a larger building in Ponteland in order to assist with providing additional specialist places for young people in Northumberland with Social, Emotional and mental health needs with effect from September 2022?

(Required)

Please select only one item

- Yes
 No

6 Please give the reasons for your answer

(Required)

7 Linked to the relocation of Atkinson House, do you support the proposal to change its provision from single sex to co-educational in order to provide additional specialist places for female students in Northumberland with Social, Emotional and mental health needs with effect from September 2022?

(Required)

Please select only one item

- Yes
 No

(Required)

Please select only one item

- Yes
 No

8 Please give the reasons for your answer

(Required)

9 If you have an alternative proposal to the relocation of Atkinson House that you believe would achieve the additional places required for young people with SEMH for September 2022, please outline it below providing as much detail as possible (or state none).

(Required)

10 Do you have any additional comments you wish the Council's Cabinet to consider when deciding on whether or not to approve further consultation on the proposals for Atkinson House?

(Required)

Glossary

It is important before responding you understand the roles, responsibilities and powers of the various organisations involved in school establishments.

The table below summarises roles/responsibilities and powers.

Organisation	Role / responsibility	Powers
Local Authority- Northumberland County Council.	Northumberland County Council must ensure that there are sufficient good school places for the parents and children who live in Northumberland. They must ensure sensible place planning. They must hold maintained schools to account for their educational and financial performance (but not academies).	The Local Authority can hold consultations. Elected members of the Council Cabinet are the decision-making body and can merge, close, or extend age ranges of maintained schools (but not academies). They cannot establish solely run academy trusts, but can be stakeholders.
Regional Schools Commissioner / Department for Education	The RSC must broker the academy conversion of failing schools. They hold Academy trusts to account for both their financial and education performance.	The RSC has powers to instruct the Local Authority to close(discontinue)schools. The RSC is the decision-making body for any changes to Academies including closure or age range extensions.
Academy Trusts	Academy Trusts are accountable for the financial and educational performance of the academy schools within its trust.	Trusts can hold consultation on changes to age range, closure and growth and set up academies (with the permission of the RSC).
Diocese	The Diocese provides support and advice to its schools through consultation. They can hold consultations. They should be consulted and provide a strategic view on behalf of their schools. Hold its schools to account for their educational and financial performance.	The Diocese can provide capital investment for faith schools. They can support or oppose closures or changes. They can establish multi-academy trusts.

As Atkinson House School is a **community special school**, the only involvement will be the Local Authority as no other organisation listed in the table above are involved in the school.

Ofsted Inspection

Atkinson House School (AHS) was inspected by Ofsted in January 2020 and was judged to require improvement for the quality of education.

[A full list of Ofsted reports can be viewed here.](#)

Consultation Register

Consultees
<p>Atkinson House Special School:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headteacher • Staff • Chair of Governors • All Governors • Parents/Carers • Students
<p>Head teachers and COG <u>only</u> at all other NCC Special Schools <u>for information</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hillcrest • Barndale House • Cleaswell Hill • Hexham Priory • Morpeth Collingwood • NCEA Castle • The Dales • The Grove • The PRU
<p>Parents AND schools/schools that may be affected</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heather Cape, Head of Richard Coates CE Primary and members of Academy Committee • Kieran McGrane, CEO Pele Trust and Chair of Trust Board • Manager of Little Tinklers Nursery, School site, Thornhill Rd, Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne NE20 9QB
<p>Other schools for information to Head and Exec Head and CoG (via school) only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seghill First • New Hartley • Seaton Delaval First • Holywell First • Seaton Sluice Middle • Whytrig Middle • Astley High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Members FOR INFORMATION / Response. • Current Ward, Seghill With Seaton Delaval, Cllr Paul Scott • Proposed Ward, Cllr Richard Dodd • Other Ponteland wards: Ponteland West – Cllr Veronica Jones; Ponteland East with Stannington – Cllr Lyle Robert Darwin; Ponteland South with Heddon – Cllr Peter Alan Jackson
<p>Public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCC website • Libraries - Cramlington library; Dudley library; Seaton Delaval Community library; Seaton Valley Community library; Seaton Sluice library

- NCC press releases picked up widely by local newspapers

Neighbouring LEA's - Director of Education (or equivalent)

Newcastle
Gateshead
North Tyneside
South Tyneside
Sunderland
Durham
Middlesbrough
Cumbria
Stockton
Redcar/Cleveland
Hartlepool
Darlington

Diocesan representatives

- CE, Paul Rickeard
- RC, Deborah Fox

Parish/Town Councils

- Ponteland Town Council

Local Councillors FOR INFORMATION

- Seaton Valley Community Council (chair Susan Dungworth)
- Ponteland North Ward

MPs FOR INFORMATION / Response

- Current MP, Ian Levy
- Proposed MP, Guy Opperman

Unions

- NEU
- NASUWT
- Unison
- Voice
- ASCL
- ATL
- NAS/UWT
- NUT
- NAHT
- Unite the Union

RSC for information**DfE for information**

Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessment

To be completed for all key changes, decisions and proposals. Cite specific data and consultation evidence wherever possible. Further guidance is available at: <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=3281>

Duties which need to be considered:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

PART 1 – Overview of the change, decision or proposal

1) Title of the change, decision or proposal:

Relocation of Atkinson House Special School to the former Richard Coates building in Ponteland and change of designation to become co-educational. The former Richard Coates building is adjacent to Richard Coates CE Primary School and to Little Tinklers Nursery.

2) Brief description of the change, decision or proposal:

The Council has carried out informal consultation on a proposal to relocate Atkinson House Special School from its current location in Seghill to a former school building in Ponteland with effect from September 2022. The rationale for this proposal is generally to be able to accommodate the growing numbers of young people in the county being identified with SEMH needs, and in particular to accommodate the students who would have been offered places at the new Gilbert Ward Academy free school had it's opening not been delayed until September 2023.

The informal consultation also includes a proposal to change the designation of Atkinson House Special School from single sex to co-educational in order to offer provision to girls with SEMH in the light of growing numbers in the county as there is currently no dedicated provision for them. This EIA has been completed following informal consultation in line with DfE guidance. Should Cabinet approve the publication of a statutory proposal, this EIA would be updated in the light of feedback from such formal consultation.

3) If you judge that this proposal is **not** relevant to some protected characteristics, tick these below (and explain underneath how you have reached this judgement).

Disability Sex Age ~~Race~~ ~~Religion~~ Sexual orientation

~~People who have changed gender~~ Women who are pregnant or have babies

Employees who are married/in civil partnerships

4) The characteristics checked above are not relevant because:

In the medium to long-term, there is no reason to believe that the proposed statutory proposal would affect more positively or negatively than their peers any group of children, parents or staff defined by their religion, race or gender-reassignment status. Should the Council decide to implement the proposed statutory proposal at a future date, during the immediate process of transition, families would be invited to inform the Council that they are concerned about the impact that the change may have on the support networks for any individual children who may be at particular risk of harassment or discrimination. Reasonable adjustments would be made to support individual students where appropriate.

It is not envisaged that this proposal would result in the need for staff redundancies at Atkinson House Special School and indeed there are likely to be additional opportunities for employment. In the event, existing HR policies covering relocation of a place of work would apply to staff employed at any of the school where appropriate. These are designed to ensure that the equalities duties of the Council and the schools are fully met. Reasonable adjustments would be made for disabled members of staff. The Council operates a guaranteed interview scheme for disabled members of staff.

PART 2 – Relevance to different Protected Characteristics

Answer these questions both in relation to people who use services and employees

Disability

Note: *“disabled people” includes people with physical, learning and sensory disabilities, people with a long-term illness, and people with mental health problems. You should consider potential impacts on all of these groups.*

5) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by disabled people, about disabled people’s experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

All students on roll at Atkinson House Special School have an EHCP for SEMH special educational needs and therefore would be disproportionately

impacted should the approval be given to implement the proposal at a future date. The intention of the proposal is that it would have a positive impact on Atkinson House students and future students. Students views on the proposal have been gained as part of the informal consultation process and the majority are in favour of the proposal. However, a number of students did have some concerns around the move to the alternative site in Ponteland.

The staff of Atkinson House Special school are trained to manage the anxieties that could arise with this group of students as result of this proposal it was approved for implementation. Staff would plan to have a phased approach to the transition with students if the relocation goes ahead, including individual transition plans according to need, to ensure that the impact of the transition is minimal and managed effectively.

Any parent or a carer of a student at Atkinson House Special School or member of staff at the school who has a disability would not be affected disproportionately by the proposal as any reasonable adjustments or arrangements already in place to support a parent, pupil or staff member would be re-provided at the new location and appropriate reasonable adjustments would be made.

It is not expected that any member of staff at one of the adjacent educational settings, parents of pupils at these settings or members of the public would have need of regular access to the grounds or building of Atkinson House Special School should it relocate to the former Richard Coates building.

6) Could disabled people be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

Refer to para. 5

7) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of disabled people to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

It is not envisaged that the implementation of the proposed statutory proposal would affect any current arrangements for disabled people to participate in public life as the former Richard Coates building is currently empty and not used by any other Council service or by members of the community.

8) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards disabled people? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is a possibility that public attitudes towards young people with SEMH could be impacted by the relocation of Atkinson House Special School to Ponteland. There is no specialist SEND provision within the Ponteland Partnership of schools, either as stand-alone provision or within any of the schools in the partnership.

Feedback received from those consultees who responded during the informal consultation indicates that there is some anxiety among staff at the adjacent educational settings, parents of pupils at these settings and members of the public about the possible behaviour of students at Atkinson House Special School as a result of their SEMH needs.

Should the proposal be approved, appropriate safeguarding measures would be put in place to ensure that all students (including those on roll at Atkinson House) are safe and that all 3 educational provisions and the wider public feel safe.

While there has been some positive feedback from the public about the proposal, there has been a minor element of public feedback that has demonstrated a lack of understanding of the condition of SEMH and use of offensive statements towards this group of vulnerable young people.

Assimilation of the school into the Ponteland community would need to be very carefully managed to engender good and collaborative relationships, and the Governing Body and Leadership Team of the school are fully cognisant of this need.

9) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that disabled people will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Further to para. 8, there could be a risk of harassment or victimisation of young people attending Atkinson House Special school if the transition is not managed effectively and the school is not able to assimilate within the community.

The measures set out in para. 8 regarding relationships with adjacent settings and the wider community would need to be put in place.

10) If there are risks that disabled people could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

The premise of the proposal is that the educational experience of young people attending Atkinson House would be enhanced by the relocation to the former Richard Coates building and therefore there is a disproportionate advantage of the proposal to them.

11) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for disabled people linked to this change, decision or proposal?

Refer to para. 10.

Sex (Gender)

12) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal in relation to people of a certain gender, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

Currently Atkinson House Special School is designated as a single sex provision for boys diagnosed with SEMH special educational needs aged 11 to 16. Under the proposal, the school would not only relocate, but would extend its provision to secondary aged girls diagnosed with SEMH as there is no dedicated provision currently for them in Northumberland.

13) Could people of a certain gender be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

While the proposal to relocate the school would advantage the current and future cohort of boys attending Atkinson House Special School, it would disproportionately advantage girls as provision for them would start to be offered at the school.

14) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of people of a certain gender to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

There is currently no evidence from consultation to suggest that the ability of people of a certain gender to participate in public life would be affected by the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 5 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

15) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people of a certain gender (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

To date, there has been no evidence to suggest that public attitudes to people with people of a certain gender. However, ameliorating actions such as those stated in para. 5 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

16) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people of a certain gender will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Should the statutory proposal be implemented, the risk of harassment of victimisation of people of a certain gender would be monitored. Should evidence

be identified that risk of harassment had increased, the relevant actions such as those stated in para. 5 would be implemented.

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any member of the public, pupil in one of the adjacent education settings, parent of a pupil in one of the adjacent education settings or member of staff at one of the adjacent education settings of certain genders would be more or less likely to be at risk of harassment or victimisation should approval be given to implement the proposal. However, should any of member of this protected group of people be identified as at risk as a result of the implementation of this proposal, the authority would encourage staff of Atkinson House Special School to put in place amelioration actions and suitable education programmes to increase awareness of any potential issues such as increased risk of bullying.

17) If there are risks that people of a certain gender could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

No evidence has so far been identified to suggest that people of a certain gender could be disproportionately disadvantaged through the implementation of the proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 2 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

18) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people with different sexual orientations linked to this change, decision or proposal?

While none have been so far identified, any opportunities to create positive impacts for people with different genders would be implemented.

Age

19) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by people of different age groups, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

Atkinson House Special School provides specialist education to pupils with SEMH needs between 11 and 16 and it is this group of young people who would be most affected by the proposal.

Staff at the school are employed equitably in accordance with the relevant school and council's employment policies. No staff at the school would be at risk of redundancy should the proposal be approved for implementation and indeed there may be additional staff required as a result of the proposed increase in student numbers and redesignation to become co-educational.

20) Could people of different age groups be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

All students on roll at Atkinson House Special School have an EHCP for SEMH special educational needs and therefore would be disproportionately impacted should the approval be given to implement the proposal at a future date. The intention of the proposal is that it would have a positive impact on Atkinson House students and future students.

21) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of people of different age groups to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposed statutory proposal would have any effect on the ability of different age groups to participate in public life.

22) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people of different age groups? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is a possibility that public attitudes towards young people with SEMH could be impacted by the relocation of Atkinson House Special School to Ponteland, but more as a result of the SEMH needs rather than their age.

Refer to para. 8 for further information.

23) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people of different age groups will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

There could be a risk of harassment or victimisation of the young people attending Atkinson House Special school if the transition is not managed effectively and the school is not able to assimilate within the community.

From consultation feedback, there is a level of concern from some consultees who responded regarding the potential behaviour of Atkinson House Special School students in the Ponteland community and therefore there could be a perceived risk of harassment. As stated, the Governing Body and Leadership team of the school would be keen to build relationships with their adjacent educational settings and the wider community to reduce any levels of concern about the presence of students with SEMH and provide a wider understanding of their needs.

24) If there are risks that people of different age groups could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

Ref. Para. 23.

25) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people of different age groups linked to this change, decision or proposal?

The premise of the proposal is to create a positive impact for this group of young people with SEMH needs.

Through the Governing Body and Leadership team of the school working with their educational neighbours and the wider community there could be opportunities to broaden their understanding of special educational needs and in particular SEMH which could be to their advantage.

Pregnancy and Maternity

Note: the law covers pregnant women or those who have given birth within the last 26 weeks, and those who are breast feeding.

26) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by pregnant women and those who have children under 26 weeks, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposal would create any barriers to students of Atkinson House Special School accessing the school should it relocate to Ponteland as all student as they would receive Home to School Transport.

In addition, any parent of a student at Atkinson House who may be pregnant or who has other children under 26 weeks old would not be disadvantaged due to the eligibility of students for transport.

Any staff of Atkinson House Special School who may be pregnant would have the same rights extended to them at the proposed site as at the current school site.

27) Could pregnant women and those with children under 26 weeks be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

No, for the reasons set out in para.26.

28) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

No, for the reasons set out in para.26.

29) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is no evidence to suggest that the statutory proposal would have any effect on public attitudes to this protected group under the proposals.

30) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

No evidence has arisen during consultation to suggest that the statutory proposal would make it more or less likely that this protected group would be at risk of harassment or victimisation under the proposals.

31) If there are risks that pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

No evidence has been identified during the consultation period that would suggest that the protected group could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the implementation of the statutory proposal for the reasons set out above.

However, if a decision is made to take the next steps towards implementation of the statutory proposal, and any disproportionate disadvantages are identified during the subsequent phases of consultation and implementation, these would be reviewed and solutions to remove such disadvantages would be sought.

32) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks linked to this change, decision or proposal?

Ref. para. 26.

Sexual Orientation

Note: The Act protects bisexual, gay, heterosexual and lesbian people.

33) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by people with different sexual orientations, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any student on roll at Atkinson House Special School or a member of staff who identifies as LGBT would be

disproportionately impacted positively or negatively should approval be given to implement the proposal.

However, should any pupil or member of staff who identifies with this group be identified as requiring support, the authority would encourage staff of Atkinson House Special School to use the Stonewall Education champion's resources and to increase awareness of any potential issues such as increased risk of bullying.

Should a member of staff identifying as LGBT in Atkinson House Special School feel that their support networks have been disrupted, staff would be made aware of the support available through the Council's LGBT staff group and managers will be made aware of the guide to supporting LGBT staff on the Council Equality and Diversity webpage. HR policies aim to promote equality and inclusion.

34) Could people with different sexual orientations be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

There is currently no evidence from consultation to suggest that different sexual orientations would be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

35) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of people with different sexual orientations to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

There is currently no evidence from consultation to suggest that the ability of people with different sexual orientations to participate in public life would be affected by the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

36) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people with different sexual orientations? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

To date, there has been no evidence to suggest that public attitudes to people with different sexual orientations. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

37) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people with different sexual orientations will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Should the statutory proposal be implemented, the risk of harassment of victimisation of people with different sexual orientations would be monitored.

Should evidence be identified that risk of harassment had increased, the relevant actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented.

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any member of the public, pupil in one of the adjacent education settings, parent of a pupil in one of the adjacent education settings or member of staff at one of the adjacent education settings who identifies as LGBT would be more or less likely to be at risk of harassment or victimisation. should the approval be given to implement the proposal. However, should any of this group of people who identifies within this protected group be identified as at risk as a result of the implementation of this proposal, the authority would encourage the staff of Atkinson House Special School to use the Stonewall Education champion's resources and to increase awareness of any potential issues such as increased risk of bullying

38) If there are risks that people with different sexual orientations could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

No evidence has so far been identified to suggest that people with different sexual orientations could be disproportionately disadvantaged through the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

39) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people with different sexual orientations linked to this change, decision or proposal?

While none have been so far identified, any opportunities to create positive impacts for people with different sexual orientations would be implemented, possibly through the implementation of the actions set out in para. 33.

Human Rights

40) Could the change, decision or proposal impact on human rights? (e.g. the right to respect for private and family life, the right to a fair hearing and the right to education)

While there is no specific evidence to suggest that the implementation of the proposal would impact positively on human rights, the rationale for this proposal is to provide additional and appropriate educational support and facilities for a vulnerable group of young people with SEMH needs and therefore this would improve the life chances of the students.

PART 3 - Course of Action

Based on a consideration of all the potential impacts, indicate one of the following as an overall summary of the outcome of this assessment:

	The equality analysis has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.
X	The equality analysis has identified risks or opportunities to promote better equality; the change, decision or proposal would be adjusted to avoid risks and ensure that opportunities are taken should they be required.
	The equality analysis has identified risks to equality which will not be eliminated, and/or opportunities to promote better equality which will not be taken. Acceptance of these is reasonable and proportionate, given the objectives of the change, decision or proposal, and its overall financial and policy context.
	The equality analysis shows that the change, decision or proposal would lead to actual or potential unlawful discrimination, or would conflict with the Council's positive duties to an extent which is disproportionate to its objectives. It should not be adopted in its current form.

41) Explain how you have reached the judgement ticked above, and summarise any steps which will be taken to reduce negative or enhance positive impacts on equality.

From the initial analysis of the possible negative or positive impacts of the proposal on the groups with protected characteristics, there is evidence to suggest that the students of Atkinson House Special School would be disproportionately advantaged simply by virtue of the premise of the proposal and its rationale set out at para. 2. Should a decision be made by the Council's Cabinet to take move to the formal statutory process, any evidence arising from the statutory consultation that suggests that there could be possible negative impacts, identified risks would be analysed to establish whether or not there were certain risks to any or all of those groups. Steps to reduce negative impacts or enhance positive impacts would then be defined.

PART 4 - Ongoing Monitoring

42) What are your plans to monitor the actual impact of the implementation of the change, decision or proposal on equality of opportunity? (include action points and timescales)

This EIA has assessed in the light of feedback from the informal consultation period. Should the proposal be approved and the process move to the publication of a statutory proposal, the EIA would be further updated at the end of the statutory period. Appropriate action would be identified in the light of the consultation and where necessary, an action plan with timescales developed.

PART 5 - Authorisation

Name of Head of Service and Date Approved

Once completed, send your full EIA to: Irene.Fisher@northumberland.gov.uk. A summary will then be generated corporately and published to the Council's website.